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ABSTRACT

Following the 1990 census, which determined that 12.3% of West Virginia's citizens over 25 years old were college graduates while the national average was 23.6 percent, several initiatives were undertaken to raise standards for education. This paper reports on a study designed to elicit the opinions of students, educators, and parents about motivating influences and obstacles affecting high school students' academic success. Students (N=360) from nine high schools in inner city, urban, and rural settings completed a questionnaire and participated in taped interviews. Each school held a Focus Group meeting where students, parents, and teachers discussed the dynamics underlying student motivation. The report, presented in both text and table form and featuring comments from participants, explains the data compiled from the survey. Some significant findings include: (1) students planning to attend college were receiving much better grade than other students; (2) nearly 58% of fathers of college-bound students had college or graduate school, and the pattern was similar for mothers; and (3) only 6% of students who planned on attending college qualified for free or reduced meals compared to 48% of other students. Several shared motivators and obstacles for both the college-bound student and non college-bound are noted. (Contains 2 appendixes.) (Author/JDM)

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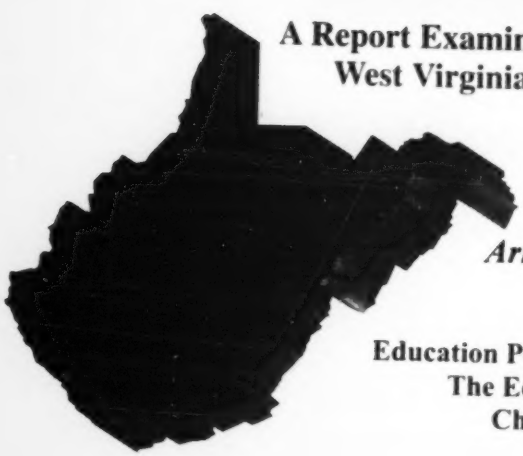
Students Speak: "What Motivates Us?"

A Report Examining The Factors Motivating West Virginia's High School Students



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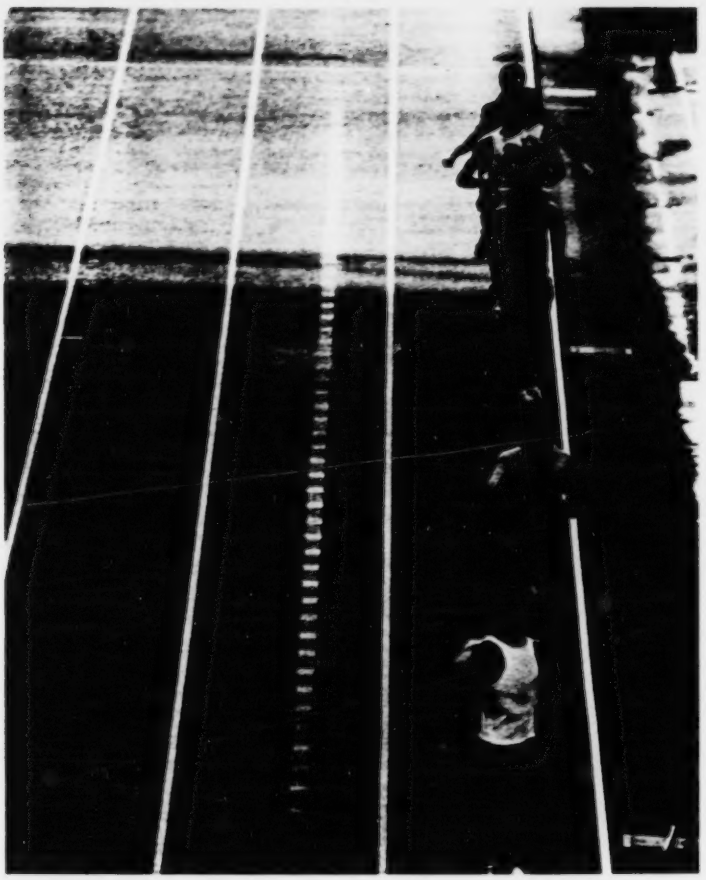
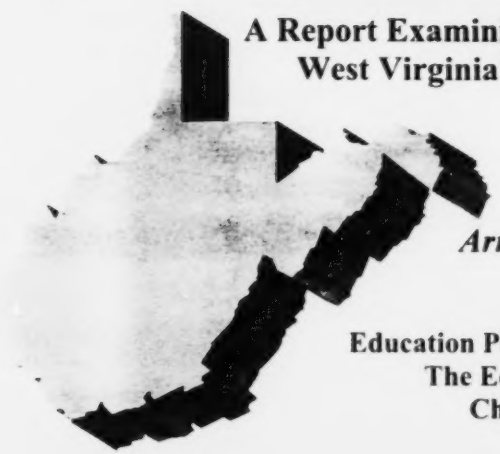


A Report Examining The Factors Motivating West Virginia's High School Students



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Finally, I am pleased and proud to offer a special thanks to the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation for their enlightened commitment in providing long-term financial support to the Education Policy Research Institute.

It is my deep hope that this research effort will in some small way advance the common goal we all share: "To provide the highest quality of education for every West Virginia student."

Denise Magolin

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Executive Summary

"Students Speak: What Motivates Us?" was a study designed to elicit through surveys, personal interviews and focus groups the opinions of students, professional educators and parents concerning the complex subject of motivating influences and obstacles affecting today's West Virginia high school students overall academic success.

PROCEDURES

In order to accomplish this goal, 360 students from nine different high schools were asked to complete a written questionnaire and to participate in a taped interview to further develop and expand upon their written responses. The actual total number of participants was 343 (182 male students, 53% of the sample and 161 female students, 47% of the sample). In an effort to achieve a broad balance which reflected a reasonable cross-section of the entire state, three different types of schools were selected within each of the following categories: inner city, urban area, and rural. Each of the schools identified 20 students (five from each grade level 9-12) who were planning to go to college, and 20 students who were not planning to go to college. Additionally, 154 interviews were conducted with school personnel, an average of approximately 17 individuals at each of the nine schools in the study. Finally, each school hosted a Focus Group meeting where parents and teachers of the students involved in the project discussed the dynamics underlying student motivation from their experienced perspectives.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The analysis of the demographic information reported on the surveys indicated significant differences between the two groups of students. The most noteworthy of these were as follows:

- On average, those students planning to attend college were achieving much better grades compared to those not planning to attend college.
- Nearly six in ten (58%), of the fathers of the college bound students had either finished college or graduate school compared to approximately one in ten (9%) of the fathers of the students not planning to attend college.
- Over 60 percent of the mothers of college bound students either finished college or graduate school. The corresponding figure for the non-college bound mothers was 15 percent.
- The number of students (expressed as a percentage) eligible to receive "free and/or reduced" meals within the sample group planning to attend college, only one of every sixteen (6%), was eligible to participate. This compared to 48 percent of those not planning to go to college.

OBSTACLES

Nine of the top ten obstacles identified by each group of students were in the same categories. To the extent there were differences, they were in relation to the relative weight (ranking) the two groups assigned to the respective obstacles. Overall, homework (magnitude and difficulty) was the number one obstacle in aggregate responses with a combined response level of 29 percent. The top three obstacles for college bound students were: 1) Sports, 2) Homework, and 3) Boyfriend/Girlfriend. For those not planning to attend college they were: 1) Homework, 2) Boyfriend/Girlfriend, and 3) Teachers.

MOTIVATORS

"Family" was ranked the number one motivating influence by both groups of students. In fact, "family involvement" was explicitly referenced by 98 percent of the students participating in the study. The top three motivators for college bound students were: 1) Family, 2) Career, and 3) Self-Satisfaction. For those not planning to go to college they were: 1) Family, 2) Career, and 3) Teachers. Approximately seven in ten (72%), of the college bound group predicted they would leave West Virginia to pursue their careers. Moreover, approximately eight in ten (83%), of those not planning to go to college believed they would remain in West Virginia to pursue their chosen careers.

PUBLIC POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

As a product of the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the cumulative information generated as a result of the research project, the following issues (questions) were identified for future consideration:

1. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from an increase in the number of professional counselors available for guidance?
2. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from changing the time classes begin each day?
3. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from participating in an "Organizational Seminar"?
4. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from implementing comprehensive programs which emphasized successful techniques to improve motivation?
5. What economic strategies can our state implement to insure that today's high school students will have the option, opportunity (in a real economic sense), and motivation to become tomorrow's West Virginia adults?

Background and Introduction

The U.S. Department of Commerce reported as part of the last official Census in 1990, that approximately 12.3 percent of West Virginia's population of persons 25 years and older were college graduates. This compared to the national average of approximately 23.6 percent.

During the past decade, our elected representatives, professional educators, business and community leaders, parents and the general public have all been engaged in an intensive effort to raise and enforce higher standards in our schools with the goal of improving the quality of education for every student. This collective emphasis on enhancing public education in West Virginia has manifested itself in numerous policy initiatives and substantive strategies designed to raise the expectations for all students and their respective levels of academic achievement. Whether students go from high school to college, other post-secondary education or directly into the workforce, students need to acquire a strong motivation to learn, a trait that provides lifelong rewards.

Some of the more salient examples of changes that have occurred during the past ten years which underscore the high priority West Virginia has placed on educational improvements include the following:

- The passage of legislation (Jobs Through Education Act, 1996), which established a new policy framework and guidelines for increased academic achievement and career development opportunities for all students;

- The adoption of the Stanford Achievement test instrument beginning with the 1996-97 school year, which replaced the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), that had been utilized since 1976. Moreover, all grades began participating in the process compared to the former program, which only involved grades three, six, nine and eleven;

- The development of new "Instructional Goals and Objectives" in 1996 for all grade levels (K-12), and subject areas, which clearly defined and articulated with specificity, the essential skills and competencies students need to acquire for their success;

- The implementation of a new, more rigorous and comprehensive "Performance Based Accreditation System" designed to promote higher student achievement and evidence that schools are developing capacities to meet the needs of their students;

- The launching of a statewide basic skills computer education program that, since 1990, has witnessed the installation of over 29,000 computer workstations statewide. This ten-year program has provided hardware and software for every school in the state. Additionally, every school in the state (over 800) is now connected to the Internet;

- Through the establishment of the School Building Authority, a massive long-term financial commitment has been made for the acquisition, construction and renovation of public school buildings. To date, over $500 million in state funds combined with roughly $278 million in local funds has resulted in approximately 67 new schools and over 800 additions and improvement projects in over 400 schools throughout the fifty-five county districts. This has translated into three-fourths (or approximately 225,000) of West Virginia's students being able to attend school in new or recently renovated buildings; and

- Other initiatives include local empowerment through Faculty Senates, Local School Improvement Councils and School Curriculum Teams, statewide training academies for principals and administrators, and a plethora of staff development programs addressing current issues for the more than 24,000 professional educators working in the public schools.

These efforts along with many others, are clearly paying dividends in terms of improved student test scores, graduation rates, increased community and parental involvement, business support through partnering relationships, and recognition nationally that West Virginia's public school system compares favorably with the other 49 states based on a set of objective criteria.[1]

All of the above suggests that if the state establishes education as a compelling priority, all students will respond accordingly, and learn more in school and become self-motivated learners in a world of constant changes. However, well over a century of experience has taught society that motivating students is simply not that straightforward or that easy to accomplish.

Students Speak: "What Motivates Us?" was designed to elicit, through surveys, personal interviews and focus groups the opinions of students, professional educators and parents concerning the complex subject of motivation among West Virginia's high school students. What influences really affect the motivation of students to learn? What obstacles do they need to overcome in their pursuit of knowledge? Finally, what are the public policy implications and considerations identified as a result of the empirical research? ❑

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[1] Quality Counts, A Report Card On The Condition of Public Education In The Fifty States, Education Week, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 editions.

Procedures and Methodology

This study was designed initially to involve 360 students from nine different high schools; however, the final number of participants was slightly lower (343). The students were drawn from a statewide total high school enrollment (i.e., grades 9-12) in 1998-99 of 90,954[2] attending approximately 127 high schools.[3]

In an effort to achieve a broad representative sample of schools and students which reflected a reasonable cross-section of the entire state and, on balance, all socio-economic regions, three different types of schools were chosen within each category: inner city, urban area, and rural. Moreover, included among the sample were schools that were relatively old and new, and relatively large and small, in terms of their respective student enrollments. The sample included 161 female students (47%), and 182 male students (53%).

Each participating school was asked to identify 20 students (five from each grade level) who were planning to go to college, and 20 students (five from each grade level) who were not planning to go to college to be included in the study. Voluntary participation in the project consisted of basically two elements:

1. A written questionnaire, which took approximately 20 minutes to complete; and
2. A taped one-on-one interview, which lasted on average 17 minutes.

As part of the research design, the parents (or legal guardians) of the students granted their approval by signing permission forms for their sons and/or daughters. In addition to demographic information, the questionnaires included statements addressing different aspects of motivation, for which the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements and to briefly explain the reasons for their answers. Additionally, the survey instrument asked the students to identify the top three motivating influences and the top three

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[2] West Virginia Department of Education, 1999 Source Book, Public Education in West Virginia, February, 1999, p. 58.

[3] For purposes of this research, high school was defined to include all schools which had a grade twelve. Accordingly, there were 25 schools contained within the total of 127 that provided some and/or all of the grades K-8, as part of their class offerings and academic curriculum in addition to the grades 9-12.

obstacles which, in their opinion, directly affected how well they did in school (see Appendix A for the complete survey).

The interview process and collection of the questionnaires was completed during the time period February 22, 1999 - October 20, 1999. All of the student interviews (with the exception of three, which were done by telephone) were conducted on the campus of the respective high schools at locations and times that were convenient for the participants. The interviews were fairly standardized, with the same instructions and questions provided for each interview. The questions concentrated on those substantive areas the students identified most often in their survey responses. Additionally, students were afforded the opportunity to amplify and expand upon their written answers. They also were asked questions, which addressed their career plans for the future, and what advice they would offer younger students as they prepare for their high school years. Finally, those students who were planning to go to college were asked to identify the colleges and/or universities they were most seriously considering applying to, and the one institution they were most likely to attend, if accepted.

The author visited each high school campus for approximately 10 days during which, in addition to the taped student interviews, informal conversations (untaped, but nonetheless, on the record) were conducted with the schools' principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, and numerous faculty and school service personnel, exploring those factors that motivate students to do well in school.[4] Moreover, numerous additional informal conversations were conducted with other students than those directly in the study, to gain a greater in-depth perspective and an overall "qualitative feel" for the school's culture and environment in finding ways to actively engage students in the learning process.

As part of the study, each participating school was also asked to host a Focus Group. The purpose of these meetings was to examine the dynamics underlying student motivation and their ramifications from the perspectives of the parents, teachers, counselors and administrators of the students involved in the research. Each Focus Group was designed to have between 10-25 participants. All of the students in the study were invited to the sessions; however, those who attended were not directly involved in the discussions, but rather were present as observers. Each Focus Group was scheduled at a time that was the most convenient for the participants at each respective school[5] and lasted approximately one hour. Insights from these groups

[4] There were a total of 154 interviews with school personnel, an average of approximately 17 individuals at each of the nine schools in the study.

were germane to the overall dimensions of the study, and quotes were drawn from them to provide balance, context, and reactions to the attitudes conveyed through the students' surveys and interviews. Between the student interviews (343) and Focus Group meetings (9), approximately 107 hours of comments and views were captured on tape.

For purposes of reporting and identifying quotes attributable to the students directly involved in the study and the participants in the Focus Group meetings, it was understood and agreed that the confidentiality (i.e., privacy) of all individuals would be completely protected. Additionally, the names of the participating schools and their locations are not being disclosed as part of the study.

Quotes from the students (taken either from the surveys or personal interviews) are identified by the students' grade level, and whether they are (are not) currently planning to attend college upon graduation from high school. Quotes from the parents, teachers, counselors or administrators directly involved in the Focus Group meetings are identified as "Focus group participant". ❑

[5]Six of the Focus Group meetings took place in the evening between the hours of 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; two were held during the regular hours of the school day; and one was convened in the afternoon, immediately after classes ended for the day.

Demographic Analysis

The students were asked to respond to the following four background questions as part of the written survey:

1. What kinds of grades do you most frequently achieve?
2. How far did your father go in school?
3. How far did your mother go in school?
4. Are you eligible to participate in your school's "free and reduced" lunch program?

The aggregate responses from the two groups of students in the study (those planning to attend college, and those who were not planning to attend college) reveal significant and noteworthy differences, which assist in the understanding, interpretation, and macro-analysis of their respective motivations to achieve in high school.

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of the grades most frequently achieved by the two groups of students in the study.

Table 1. Percentage grade distribution of students.

Grades	College	Non-College
Mostly A's	**53%**	**4%**
Some A's and some B's	**29%**	**23%**	
Mostly B's	**9%**	**12%**
Some B's and some C's	**8%**	**36%**
Mostly C's	**1%**	**21%**
Mostly below C's	**0%**	**4%**

On balance, those planning to attend college were achieving much better grades compared to those not planning to attend college. Over half (53 percent) of the college bound students achieved "mostly A's" versus only four percent of the non-college bound students. Furthermore, only nine percent of the college bound students achieved "some B's and C's" or "mostly C's"; however, over half (57 percent) of the non-college bound students performed at these levels. Finally, a mere one percent of college bound students earned "mostly C's" or "mostly below C's", whereas 25% of the non-college bound students had those grades.

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Table 2 shows how much formal education the fathers of the students had completed.

Table 2. Level of education attained by fathers of the students.

Education Level	College	Non-College
Did not finish high school	**2%**	**28%**
Finished high school	**24%**	**52%**
Attended some college	**16%**	**11%**
Finished college	**32%**	**5%**
Finished graduate school	**26%**	**4%**

As Table 2 highlights, nearly six in ten (58%) of the fathers of the college bound students had either finished college (32%) or finished graduate school (26%). This contrasts with approximately one in ten (9%) of the fathers of the students not planning to attend college, who had either finished college (5%) or finished graduate school (4%). Similarly, only two percent of the college bound fathers did not finish high school compared to 28 percent of the non-college group. In fact, four of every five (80%) non-college bound fathers had never attended any college compared to the 26 percent of fathers of the college bound students.

Table 3 identifies how far the mothers of the students had gone in their educational pursuits.

Table 3. Level of education attained by mothers of the students.

Education Level	College	Non-College
Did not finish high school	**2%**	**24%**
Finished high school	**23%**	**48%**
Attended some college	**14%**	**13%**
Finished college	**37%**	**12%**
Finished graduate school	**24%**	**3%**

As Table 3 indicates, there is a similar pattern of education attained by the mothers of the students who participated in the study to the one experienced by the fathers. Over 60 percent of the college bound mothers either finished college (37%) or finished graduate school (24%). The corresponding figures for the non-college bound mothers were twelve percent and three percent, respectively. At the other end of the education ladder, a modest number of college bound mothers did not finish high

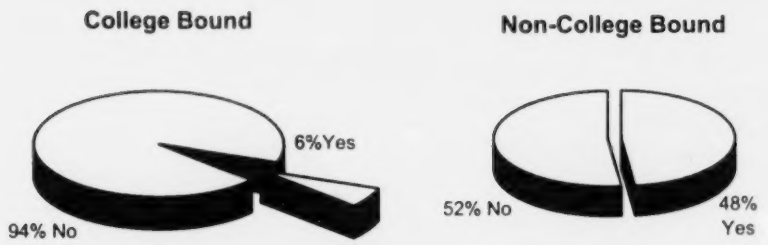
school (2%); whereas, almost one in four (24%) of the mothers of students not planning to attend college did not finish high school. Finally, almost triple the number (72% vs. 25%) of non-college mothers had not attended any college in their lifetimes.

Eligibility to participate in the state's child nutrition program for "free and/or reduced meals" is but one (albeit a reasonable) indicator of a family's general economic well being, and overall income status.[6]

Table 4 illustrates the extent to which students in the study were eligible to participate in West Virginia's child nutrition program.

Table 4. Percentage of students eligible to receive "free and/or reduced" meals.

Eligibility Status	College	Non-College
Yes	6%	48%
No	94%	52%



The number of students (expressed as a percentage) eligible to participate in the nutrition program within the group not planning to attend college mirrored, almost exactly, the statewide average for all West Virginia students in grades K-12 (48% and 49%, respectively). Included among the sample group of those who were planning to attend college, only one of every sixteen students (6%) was eligible to participate. ❑

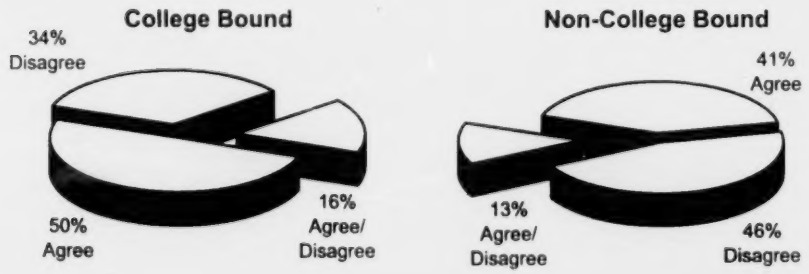
[6] Based on information provided by the Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education for the 1998-1999 school year, approximately 49 percent of all students were eligible to participate in the food program. Approximately 39 percent (118,845 students), received "free" meals and approximately ten percent (29,358 students), received "reduced" meals, representing a total of over 148,000 participants statewide.

Enthusiasm and Enjoyment

In Table 5, the responses from the students are summarized as to whether they basically agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "I am enthusiastic about coming to school and enjoy my school work very much."

Table 5. Overall student responses to "Enthusiasm and Enjoyment" statement.

Response	College	Non-College
Basically Agree	**50%**	**41%**
Basically Disagree	**34%**	**46%**
Basically Agree and Disagree	**16%**	**13%**



Exactly half of those students planning to attend college basically agreed with the survey statement, compared to 41 percent of those students not planning to attend college. Roughly a third (34%) of the college bound group basically disagreed, versus 46 percent of the non-college group. Interestingly, 16 percent and 13 percent, respectively, in each group said they both agreed and disagreed with the statement, which was reflective of their precipitous changes in attitude toward school from one day or week to another.

Tables 6 and 7 identify the top five reasons why the students not planning to attend college either basically agreed or basically disagreed with this statement.

Table 6. Non-College student "Agree" responses to "Enthusiasm and Enjoyment" statement.

Reason for Agreeing	Response
1. Getting an education is important	35%
2. School beats staying home (something to do)	22%
3. Spending time with friends	19%
4. Teachers make school fun	10%
5. Learning new things	9%

Table 7. Non-College student "Disagree" responses to "Enthusiasm and Enjoyment" statement.

Reason for Disagreeing	Response
1. Don't understand the work	36%
2. Have to get up too early	19%
3. Don't like the "block schedule"[7]	18%
4. Teachers are boring	12%
5. Too much homework	10%

Tables 8 and 9 present the top five reasons why the students planning to attend college either basically agreed or disagreed with this statement.

Table 8. College student "Agree" responses to "Enthusiasm and Enjoyment" statement.

Reason for Agreeing	Response
1. Learning new things	27%
2. Enjoy being successful (getting good grades)	17%
3. Enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers	15%
4. Attending a good college	14%
5. Getting an education is important	13%

Table 9. College student "Disagree" responses to "Enthusiasm and Enjoyment" statement.

Reason for Disagreeing	Response
1. School is boring	25%
2. Have to get up too early	23%
3. School is not a challenge	16%
4. Teachers don't really care about me	10%
5. Too much emphasis on testing	9%

[7] A block schedule can have several different variations or versions, but typically it provides for students to take four academic subjects daily, with each class lasing approximately 90 minutes.

"I am enthusiastic about coming to school and enjoy my school work very much"

Representative comments basically agreeing with statement:

"I enjoy learning. These are the best days of our lives." (12th grade college)

"I enjoy most of my classes and teachers. I like my small high school and personal relationship between the teachers and students. I feel I am receiving a great education and enjoy learning." (12th grade college)

"I get to learn a lot of new things and I get a taste of what I would like to do for the rest of my life." (11th grade college)

"Coming to school helps me prepare for things I need in the real world." (11th grade student)

"My teachers make it fun to do work, and I enjoy my work." (11th grade student)

"It's a good place to socialize and learn about things." (11th grade student)

"I get to see my friends and learn how to be successful in life." (10th grade student)

"My daughter enjoys school because she enjoys the challenge." (Focus group participant)

Representative comments basically disagreeing with statement:

"The work is sometimes hard for me to do, I don't understand it." (9th grade student)

"No one is really happy about getting up at 6 a.m. in the morning and coming here to learn." (10th grade student)

"When you get up in the morning at 6:30 a.m. it's hard to be enthusiastic about anything." (12th grade college)

"I don't look forward to coming and sitting for 90 minutes and it's the same thing everyday. I get bored." (11th grade college)

"Teachers make it boring. They don't make learning fun at all. They just talk and that's so boring." (10th grade college)

"I don't think the classes are challenging enough and interesting enough for me to be willing and ready and excited in going to school everyday." (11th grade college)

"I'm sure most of my peers would agree with me, with school comes unbelievable large amounts of stress, that at times, I am incapable of withstanding. Classes are so demanding these days, it's hard to keep up." (10th grade college)

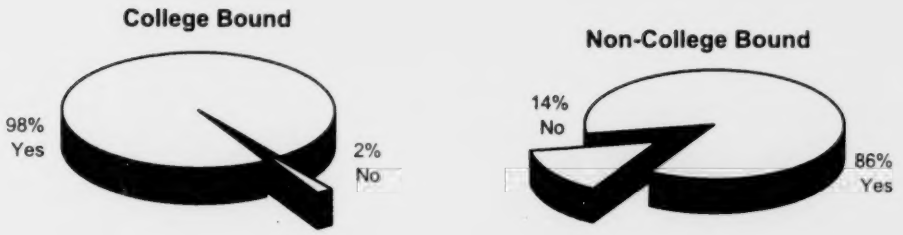
"I'm not a morning person. My son isn't a morning person. We're terrible at getting up and getting motivated to go anywhere at 6 a.m. in the morning. It's really tough on these kids. It really is." (Focus group participant) ❑

"School is (is not) a High Priority"

By rather significant and impressive majorities, both groups of students, when asked to complete one of the following statements: "School is a high priority in my life because..." or "School is not a high priority in my life because..." reported that school was indeed, very important to them (Table 10).

Table 10. Overall student responses to "Priority" statement.

Response	College	Non-College
High Priority	**98%**	**86%**
Not A High Priority	**2%**	**14%**



For those planning to attend college, over half (54%) expressed the view that high school was a high priority because of its importance and relationship to pursuing a professional career. (Table 11).

Table 11. College student "High Priority" responses.

Reason	Response
1. To achieve my career objective	**54%**
2. To get accepted to college (of my choice)	**23%**
3. To prove I can do well	**8%**
4. To participate in extra-curricular activities	**6%**
5. To "grow" as a person	**5%**

Included among the two percent of responses from the college bound students addressing why they felt school was not a high priority, were the following:

1. "I really don't consider school a major part of my life," and
2. "I don't think school is going to help me achieve my goals."

Table 12 provides the top five reasons why non-college bound students believed school was a high priority in their lives.

Table 12. Non-College student "High Priority" responses.

Reason	Response
1. To get a job	72%
2. To feel proud of myself	10%
3. To graduate with my friends	9%
4. To join the armed services	4%
5. To avoid feeling like a failure (if I don't graduate)	3%

For those not planning to attend college, seven in ten (72%) expressed the view that graduating from high school would be critical to their success in finding a decent paying job after they completed their studies.

Table 13 examines the most prevalent reasons why non-college bound students felt school was not a high priority.

Table 13. Non-College student "Not a High Priority" responses.

Reason	Response
1. School is boring	31%
2. Rather be working (and making money)	22%
3. Too much homework (not enough time)	16%
4. Just not a "school person"	10%
5. No longer learning anything I need to know	9%

"School is a high priority in my life because..."

"School is not a high priority in my life because..."

Representative comments basically agreeing with high priority statement:

"It's the key to my future. The more keys I have on my key chain, the more doors I can open. I feel that education is one of those keys." (11th grade college)

"It's a big factor in my life. Without education you couldn't get a job and make good money."(11th grade student)

"It teaches you skills you need to know when you go into the workforce." (12th grade student)

"It allows me the opportunity to go to college." (11th grade college)

"It's a stepping stone to what I eventually want to become." (11th grade college)

"I think that it starts a good base that builds character, good self-esteem, strong effort and attitude."(10th grade student)

"I would feel like a failure if I didn't attend school and graduate." (12th grade student)

"School is definitely a high priority to my daughter because she wants to learn, and secondly, because she has pretty high aspirations." (Focus group participant)

Representative comments basically disagreeing with high priority statement:

"School is basically a waste of my time. My classes bore me to death." (10th grade student)

"I have better stuff that I could be doing, like making money." (9th grade student)

"I think some of the work you do in school is really not needed to get a job." (10th grade student)

"School stresses me out. Going to school all day and then going to work just doesn't leave enough time to study and do homework." (12th grade student) ❑

25

"I Try Hard to Achieve Good Grades"

Table 14 breaks down the reactions of the students to the statement: "I try hard to achieve good grades on tests, and all the other assignments I have in my classes."

Table 14. Overall student responses to "I Try Hard" statement.

Response	College	Non-College
Basically Agree	**88%**	**80%**
Basically Disagree	**12%**	**20%**

Nearly nine in ten (88%) of those planning to attend college, and eight in ten (80%) of those not planning to attend college responded affirmatively, which represented a strong positive sense of agreement with the statement in the questionnaire.

Tables 15 and 16 examine the top five explanations given by those students planning to attend college, for either basically agreeing or disagreeing with the proposition of "trying hard."

Table 15. College student "Agree" responses to "Trying Hard" statement.

Reason for Agreeing	Response
1. To get accepted to college (of my choice)	50%
2. To win a scholarship	32%
3. It's my responsibility to do my best	10%
4. It makes me feel good about myself	3%
5. The fear of failure (and repeat the subject)	2%

Table 16. College student "Disagree" responses to "Trying Hard" statement.

Reason for Disagreeing	Response
1. Do just enough to get by	25%
2. Teachers don't make learning interesting	20%
3. Many other things I enjoy doing more than schoolwork	18%
4. Hate to study (drives me crazy)	15%
5. Subjects are boring (especially math and science)	10%

For those not planning to attend college, Tables 17 and 18 present the top five reasons students basically agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Table 17. Non-College student "Agree" responses to "Trying Hard" statement.

Reason for Agreeing	Response
1. To graduate with my friends	34%
2. To get a good job	20%
3. Makes me feel proud of myself	16%
4. To make my mom happy	12%
5. To stay eligible for sports	10%

Table 18. Non-College student "Disagree" responses to "Trying Hard" statement.

Reason for Disagreeing	Response
1. Don't like studying (not enough time)	50%
2. Teachers are boring	15%
3. Always wait until the last minute (procrastinate)	14%
4. Give up too easily	12%
5. Dealing with personal problems at home	8%

"I try hard to achieve good grades on tests, and all the other assignments I have in my classes."

Representative comments basically agreeing with statement:

"Grades are my permanent record. To impress colleges, I want to make the grades." (11th grade college)

"My goal right now is to get out of high school, and graduate with my friends." (10th grade student)

"We don't have a lot of money, and grades are important to win a scholarship." (10th grade college)

"I know it's important to get good grades, so I can get a decent job." (11th grade student)

"I'm very self-motivated, and I've always pushed myself to do the best no matter what I'm doing. School is no different." (12th grade college)

"So I can have the grades to play sports and drive. When I have good grades my mom is happy, and I have more freedom at home." (10th grade student)

"In our home grades are a priority, and there is an emphasis on doing well. Our son has always seen us place a lot of emphasis on his schoolwork, and because of this he tries to please us." (Focus group participant)

Representative comments basically disagreeing with statement:

"Once in a while I find myself doing what it takes to get by, just going for the "B" and not striving for the "A." (12th grade college)

"I plain out don't like studying." (10th grade student)

"My teachers aren't interesting. They don't expect much work from me." (11th grade college)

"I don't try hard because teachers make it boring. I can't stay focused on what I'm supposed to do." (10th grade student)

"I tend to procrastinate, which makes me not do as well on my assignments." (12th grade college)

"I do just enough to get by because I'm dealing with too much other stuff at home." (12th grade student)

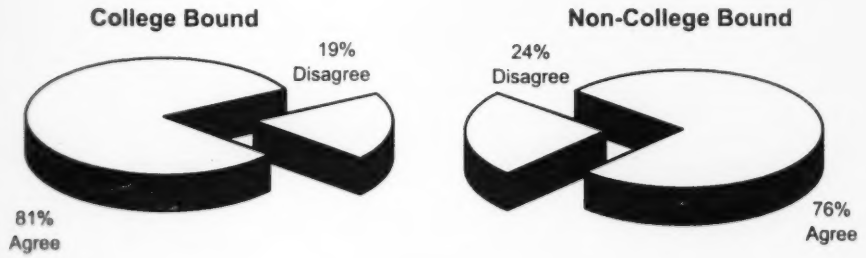
"My daughter just gives up too easily when she doesn't understand the work. Then, once she falls behind, she can never catch up with the class." (Focus group participant) ❑

"High school will be very important to my future success"

In assessing the potential relationship or link between what they were learning today to their success tomorrow (i.e., future), both groups of students articulated the view, by large margins, that the connection was a real one. (Table 19).

Table 19. Overall student responses to "Important to Future Success" statement.

Response	College	Non-College
Basically Agree	**81%**	**76%**
Basically Disagree	**19%**	**24%**



Of those students planning to attend college, approximately four in ten (41%) felt the primary reason what they studied was important because, it was necessary to get accepted to college (Table 20).

Table 20. College student "Agree" responses to "Future Success" statement.

Reason for Agreeing	Response
1. To get accepted to college	**41%**
2. Will help with future job(s)	**27%**
3. Assist with preparing me for challenges	**15%**
4. Provides the basic skills for rest of my life	**12%**
5. Teaches me to be responsible	**3%**

Table 21 summarizes the most frequently cited reasons why college-bound students disagreed with the "Future Success" statement.

Table 21. College student "Disagree" responses to "Future Success" statement.

Reason for Disagreeing	Response
1. Most classes are just "busywork"	47%
2. Required classes are not what I really need	22%
3. Will forget most of the "stuff"	15%
4. Will not help with my career	8%
5. Skills I need aren't taught (subjects not offered)	5%

For those students not planning to attend college, Tables 22 and 23 describe the top five reasons why they either basically agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Table 22. Non-College student "Agree" responses to "Future Success" statement.

Reason for Agreeing	Response
1. Will help me get a good job	68%
2. Provide the basic skills for living	16%
3. English classes are especially important (Communication skills)	5%
4. Something to fall back on	4%
5. Helps me understand other people	3%

Table 23. Non-College student "Disagree" responses to "Future Success" statement.

Reason for Disagreeing	Response
1. Very little to do with my career	50%
2. Classes are not relevant to the "real world"	15%
3. Taught the "same old material" every year	13%
4. We need more "hands on stuff"	10%
5. Classes geared towards tests, not providing skills	8%

"What I study in school will be very important to my success in the future after I graduate."

Representative comments basically agreeing with statement:

"What I study in school helps prepare me for college. My curriculum in high school can determine how prepared I am for college classes."(12th grade college)

"Most people's job rely on what they did in school. Also, you will get a better paying job, if you graduate." (11th grade student)

"The whole purpose of school is to prepare me for the future and send me on the path to success. School gives me the skills I need to use in my daily life, as an adult. Also, what I learn outside of classes will prepare me for the future." (10th grade college)

"School gives me job training, and helps me get experience in the work force and through the vocational school work program, I get to interact with other people." (12th grade student)

"The more background I have in a particular area of study, the more qualified I will be for a job in the future." (11th grade college)

"My high school education will help me deal with other people the rest of my life. I will know how to act in different situations." (12th grade student)

"High school is the first real major step our kids take toward a career. Therefore, it is not only very important, but it is critical to their future success."
(Focus group participant)

Representative comments basically disagreeing with statement:

"Some of the classes I take have nothing to do with my career, and only a few even relate to my career. I wish we could start a program with just specific courses needed for a certain career." (12th grade student)

"Some of the stuff we learn, I won't ever use again in my life. It seems that most of the time all we do is "busywork." (10th grade college)

"The classes I'm taking right now do not have anything to do with my future career. I have too many required classes and can't fit in anything else." (10th grade college)

"I am planning to go into an art field, so most of the classes I take I find boring and question their need." (11th grade college)

"It seems as if we learn the same things from one year to the next. The material doesn't really change." (11th grade student)

"The things we learn have nothing to do with the real world we live in."
(10th grade student)

"Based on my understanding of the classes available for my son, I would have to say the courses he takes will not be important to his future success."
(Focus group participant) ❑

Obstacles

The students were asked to complete the following statement: "The top three obstacles in my life which make it difficult at times for me to do well in school are..."

> "Peer pressure, sometimes it's just not cool to be smart."
> (Focus group participant)

It is noteworthy to point out, that in terms of the aggregate responses (irrespective of whether a student was planning to attend college), there was nearly total agreement on the specific substantive obstacles identified. That is to say, with well over 1,000 responses to the statement, nine of the top ten obstacles identified by each group of students were in the same categories.[8] To the extent there were differences, they were in relation to the relative weight (i.e., priority or ranking) the two groups of students assigned to the respective obstacles (Tables 24 and 25).

Table 24. Top Ten College student Obstacles.

Obstacle Category	Response
1. Sports	15%
2. Homework	13%
3. Boyfriend/Girlfriend	12%
4. Extra-curricular activities (other than sports)	11%
5. Personal (family) problems	10%
6. Teachers	9%
7. Disruptive peers	8%
8. Part-time job	7%
9. Not enough sleep	6%
10. School is boring in general	5%

Table 25. Top Ten Non-College student Obstacles.

Obstacle Category	Response
1. Homework	16%
2. Boyfriend/Girlfriend	14%
3. Teachers	12%
4. Part-time job	11%
5. Personal (family) problems	10%
6. Not enough sleep	9%
7. Disruptive peers	9%
8. Subjects are not interesting	8%
9. Sports	6%
10. School is boring in general	4%

[8] There were a total of 1,051 responses to the statement. This was greater than three obstacles per student (343x3=1,029) due to the fact that several students decided to identify more than three obstacles.

SPORTS

"It's not just the amount of time that I'm in the actual practice itself, but you get home from practice dead tired and you don't feel like doing anything." (12th grade college)

Participation in individual and/or team sports ranked as the number one obstacle identified by college bound students (15% of the responses). For those not planning to attend college, sports ranked ninth (6% of the responses). These figures reflect a microcosm of the overall participation rates for the two groups of students. Nearly seven in ten (68%) of the college bound students were involved in at least one sport at their respective schools, compared to approximately three in ten (29%) of their counterparts. The dominant reason participation in sports was considered to be an obstacle was the significant amount of time it consumed. In fact, the students reported, on average, they spent over two hours a day during each particular "sport season," in practice time.

HOMEWORK

Overall, homework was the number one obstacle in aggregate responses. It had a combined response level of 29% (16% of the non-college group, and 13% for the college group). It ranked number one for those not planning to attend college, and number two for those who were planning to attend college. The sheer magnitude of homework was cited as the biggest problem. It was followed closely by the degree of difficulty of the assignments.

"I have too much homework to get done, and not enough time to stay on each subject." (10th grade college)

BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND

This category also included all direct references to other friends, classmates and peers of the students in the study. This category was ranked second by those not planning to attend college (14%) and third by the college bound students (12%). The strong desire to have an active social life and lots of friends was cited by eight in ten (81%) of the students as a major obstacle to doing well in school.

"I like to spend time with my friends a lot more than studying. That's really it." (9th grade college)

TEACHERS

> "A lack of motivation from teachers. Most of the time they don't show the effort and the motivation to help students with their problems."
> (12th grade college)

As with two other influences in the students' lives ("Sports" and "Friends" were the others), teachers were identified by both groups of students as being both obstacles and motivators, when it came to doing well in school. In the context of being identified as an obstacle, the three most frequently expressed observations were:

1. A style of presenting material that was boring in nature;
2. An attitude towards the students of being "aloof" and unapproachable for assistance; and
3. A lack of respect, and caring about the students as individuals.

PART-TIME JOBS

> "I have a job right after school and I can't get my homework done. By the time I get home, I want to go to bed, and if I stay up, I can't get up in the morning."
> (12th grade student)

Working, in addition to going to high school ranked fourth (non-college bound 11%) and eighth (college bound 7%), respectively, for the two groups of students. Almost half of both groups (49% college bound and 48% non-college bound) had part-time employment during the school year. Moreover, a total of five students (four non-college bound, and one college bound) were working the equivalent of a full time job (35 hours a week) at the time of this research project.

PERSONAL (FAMILY) PROBLEMS

> If your parents fight a lot at home, you feel like you need to be there to keep them away from each other."
> (10th grade student)

Dealing with problems at home, or with problems of a personal nature were cited by both groups of students with the same degree of frequency (10%). Overall, this obstacle ranked fifth in terms of relative importance. Effectively coming to terms with, and learning to adjust to, parents divorcing were by far the most prevalent obstacles students were trying to address.

NOT ENOUGH SLEEP

"If you ride the bus you may be here an hour before school starts...When you ask them, they tell you they don't take time to eat a proper breakfast. They are too tired to come to class. First period, you can hardly get a comment out of any child because they are tired."
(Focus group participant)

A lack of an adequate amount of sleep each school night was ranked sixth by those not planning to attend college (9%). For those who were college bound, this obstacle was ranked ninth (6%). Interestingly, almost all of the students in both groups who identified "not enough sleep" as a major obstacle (98% of college bound, and 97% of non-college bound) believed a later starting time for the beginning of the school day would have a positive effect on their motivation.

DISRUPTIVE PEERS

"Other students cause trouble in school. I think it should be stopped. I think they (teachers) could stop it."
(10th grade student)

Both groups of students shared the view there were too many disruptive students in their classes. The students ranked this obstacle seventh overall (college bound, 8% and non-college bound, 9% of the responses). A full 91% of the students participating in the study, expressed the need to increase discipline at their respective schools by removing these "trouble-makers" from regular classes. Participants in the focus groups reiterated and reinforced the same concerns.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

"A lot of times when I could be doing school work or studying, I've had other activities...My priorities get in the way of academics."
(12th grade college)

This category included all extra-curricular programs other than sports. For those planning to attend college it ranked fourth, with 11 percent of the responses. For those not planning to attend college, it was not ranked. In fact, it was only mentioned as an obstacle by two students in this group. The formidable challenge of attempting to balance competing desires within the discretionary time available to students, presented the greatest obstacle identified in the responses.

SCHOOL IS BORING

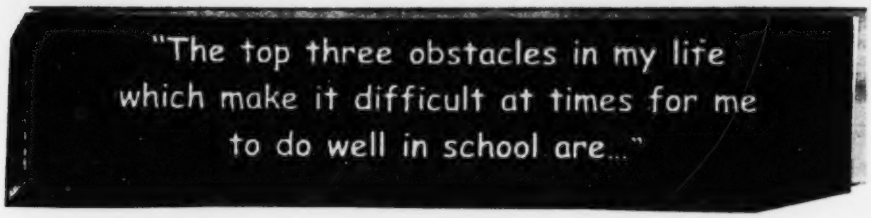
Though it ranked at the bottom of the top ten obstacles for both groups of students (5% for college bound and 4% for non-college bound), it did underscore the students' perceptions, views, and general attitudes towards their high school experiences. The most frequently cited result and tangible manifestation of boredom, was the inability to concentrate (i.e., stay focused), during classes.

"School work in high school I find is busy work. Work sheets to keep you quiet, and that doesn't really motivate me. I don't want to come to school and sit and do work sheets the whole time, or sit in class and have a study period." (12th grade college)

SUBJECTS ARE NOT INTERESTING

"A lack of interesting topics...Maybe it's because we are a small school, we can't offer a lot of different classes that are interesting to us." (12th grade college)

This obstacle was ranked eighth by those not planning to attend college (8% of the responses) and to those who were college bound, it was barely an issue (mentioned by only two students). The lack of courses within the school's curriculum which were interesting (i.e., relevant to the "real world") was the most frequently expressed concern regarding this category.



Representative responses to the statement:

"Sometimes there is so much homework. You don't have enough time to get it done. We spend all this time in school, and then you have to take all this extra work home and do it." (9th grade student)

"Playing sports is a great influence, but a great obstacle. It's a lot of time and effort, in order to be successful at that sport or whatever. You have to put a lot of time into it. It really takes away from your studies." (11th grade college)

"We have too much to study at one time, and not enough time to do it in. Teachers give us way too much homework." (9th grade student)

"For me it would be sports. I play a sport every season of the year, and they have us practice late into the evenings. It makes it real tough to get your homework done." (12th grade college)

"My number one obstacle is athletics. You've got practice every day right after school, and that limits your time to go home and study. When you get time to study, you don't get the time you really need to do the best you can." (12th grade college)

"We have homework in each subject every night, which I know you've got to have, but not that much." (10th grade student)

"All your teachers give you too much homework and that makes me tired." (10th grade college)

"My girlfriend. I want to take and spend time with her, and I would rather be with her than doing my school work." (12th grade student)

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"I want to talk to, and be with my friends more than I want to do my schoolwork." (10th grade student)

"My friends, who don't want me to do my schoolwork. They want to play basketball or something." (9th grade student)

"Finding time for all my schoolwork because I'd rather be with my friends." (11th grade college)

I'm involved with a lot of extra curricular activities, especially cheerleading, and I have to spend a lot of time doing that...and, that takes away from time I could spend with homework and studying." (10th grade college)

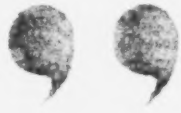
"All of the clubs and organizations I'm involved in that take time away from school, and away from studying." (10th grade college)

"Number one is definitely a lack of time because of the many activities I want to do. So many things I want to accomplish, and time is never on my side. It is just something I've had to learn to deal with. High school has been all about balancing what I have, but that has been the hardest thing to deal with." (11th grade college)

"I have a lot of other stuff to do outside of school, probably too much. There's not one thing I can give up out of those, so I have no time for schoolwork." (12th grade college)

"Teachers just constantly talking. They talk all period. It just bores you, and puts you to sleep." (11th grade student)

"Teachers, the way they act. They won't help you with your work. They don't act like they really care about me, and they don't really explain what they are trying to teach us." (12th grade student)



"Teachers just talk all the time. They don't really do anything. Half the stuff they teach, I already know. They just keep going over and over the same stuff every year." (9th grade student)

"Teachers don't want to help you, most of the time." (10th grade student)

"My parents are constantly arguing. I can't concentrate on my schoolwork." (11th grade student)

"Living at different homes with divorced parents is my biggest obstacle." (11th grade college)

"Occasional family problems wears on you emotionally, and that just makes it hard to think and concentrate."(11th grade college)

"Family problems at home. Nobody knows what goes on in your family. Everybody sees you, knows you are in school, and assumes you are fine. They don't know how bad your life is, when you are living with your family." (12th grade college)

"Family problems, I have more important things to worry about sometimes than my schoolwork." (11th grade student)

"My parents are in the middle of getting a divorce. They have been arguing and fighting and everything. We are trying to get everything settled. It has me shaken up. I can't concentrate at school or study at home." (11th grade student)

"My family is like a soap opera. They are always mad at each other, and it makes it hard to do well. I worry about small things. It's hard to concentrate when everybody at home is crazy over nothing." (10th grade college)

"School starts too early for me. I'm just not awake that early in the morning." (12th grade student)

"I don't have time to even eat breakfast before I have to leave for school. Then, ten minutes into history, I'm starving." (10th grade college)

"I don't see why we have to go to school when it's still pitch black outside. I'm not even alive for my first class on most days." (11th grade student)

"I sure could use an extra half-hour of sleep each night. It would make a big difference." (10th grade college)

"Don't they know teenagers need more sleep? We are not morning people." (9th grade college)

"There are some real jerks in this school who try to disrupt everything. They always talk in class." (9th grade student)

"Some kids don't act like they want to be here. They ruin it for the rest of us." (12th grade college)

"Normally, it's boredom. I tend to day dream and look in other directions, and miss the key points in class." (11th grade college)

"Most subjects are a waste, and they aren't interesting." (12th grade student)

"Sports motivate me, but they also hurt me at the same time. I could use those two hours each day we practice, to study more." (10th grade college)

"I need to work to pay for my car. So, I don't have enough time to study." (10th grade student)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"By the time I get home from work, I'm wiped out. The last thing I want to do is Algebra homework." (12th grade college)

"At least the work I do after school helps me get nice clothes. Nobody really cares about the work I do at school." (11th grade student)

"I've been in school my whole life. I'm burned out on it. School is just plain boring. Who wants to sit in a chair and listen to someone talk for an hour and a half?" (9th grade college)

"Peer pressure, sometimes it's not cool to be smart." (Focus group participant)

"The economic necessity (real or perceived) that they need to work. It goes back to peer pressure. Being able to keep up and have what the other kids have." (Focus group participant)

"As a parent, I think one of the biggest obstacles many kids face are their own parents. They don't emphasize education. They don't get involved. They just don't set a good example or send the right message about how important school really is." (Focus group participant)

"I think there are a lot of temptations...to smoke, or try drugs or have sex. Many of these kids aren't strong enough to resist trying everything." (Focus group participant) ❑

Motivators

The last statement on the survey was: "The top three motivating influences in my life which make me want to do well in school are..."

Similar to the consistency and agreement registered between the two groups of students in identifying their major obstacles, eight of the top ten motivators were in the same categories.[9] Likewise, to the extent there were differences, they were in relation to the relative weight (i.e., priority or ranking) the two groups of students assigned to the respective motivators (Tables 26 and 27).

Table 26. Top Ten College Student Motivating Influences.

Motivator Category	Response
1. Family	26%
2. Career	21%
3. Self-satisfaction	11%
4. Acceptance to college	10%
5. Teachers	8%
6. Friends	6%
7. Grades	5%
8. Love of Learning	4%
9. Winning a scholarship	3%
10. Sports	3%

Table 27. Top Ten Non-College Student Motivating Influences.

Motivator Category	Response
1. Family	27%
2. Career	22%
3. Teachers	11%
4. Friends	9%
5. Graduation	8%
6. Self-satisfaction	6%
7. Grades	5%
8. Armed services	4%
9. Love of learning	3%
10. Sports	3%

[9] There were a total of 1,023 responses to the statement. This was less than three motivators per student (343x3=1,029) due to the fact, that several students decided to identify less than three motivators.

FAMILY

> "My daughter knows she can come to me with anything. I might not necessarily like it, but we will get through it together. It's not like she doesn't have someone there." (Focus group participant)

This category included not only those individuals who were part of the students' immediate families (i.e., mother, father, and siblings), but also any other members of the students' "extended family" (grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives). This motivating influence was ranked number one by both groups of students, and it garnered over half of all the responses (26% for college bound and 27% for non-college). Family "involvement" was referenced by 98 percent of the students. The students shared that they talked regularly with their families about what was occurring in their classes, and what they were actually learning in school. The students expressed a strong belief their families were "concerned and connected" to what was happening in their lives at high school.

CAREER

> "I know that my education plays a vital role in getting a good job and having a solid career." (11th grade college)

The students appeared to clearly recognize and appreciate the importance society places on the value of a high school education in helping to secure a career in the future. This "motivation" was second in overall responses, with a combined level of 43 percent (22% of the non-college group, and 21% for the college group). It ranked number two for both groups of students.

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Table 28 presents the ten career positions most frequently mentioned by each group of students during their interviews.

Table 28. Students' Career Aspirations.

College	Non-College
1. Doctor	Armed Services
2. Teacher	State Trooper
3. Lawyer	Nurse's Aide
4. Computer Analyst	Auto Mechanic
5. Physical Therapist	Cosmetologist
6. Psychologist	Accounting Clerk
7. Engineer	Carpenter
8. Journalist	Computer Programmer
9. Nurse	Electrician
10. Accountant	Welder

In discussing their careers and future lives as adults, a compelling, emphatic, and distinct difference emerged between the two groups of students. Approximately, seven in ten (72%) of those planning to attend college predicted they would leave West Virginia to pursue their careers. This figure includes those students who were planning to attend college and/or graduate school within the state. Conversely, approximately eight in ten (83%) of those not planning to attend college predicted they would remain in West Virginia after completing high school to pursue their chosen careers.

SELF-SATISFACTION

"I try to do my best at everything all the time. It makes me feel good about myself...Getting good grades keeps my self esteem high." (10th grade college)

The personal satisfaction students felt from knowing they tried their best, completed their homework assignments and achieved a reasonable measure of success in their classes was a relatively strong motivating influence. It ranked third (11% of the responses) for the college bound students, and sixth (6% of the responses) for those not planning to attend college.

TEACHERS

> "There are a few teachers who truly love what they do and transmit that to their students."
> (12th grade college)

Teachers were the third highest ranked motivation by non-college students (11%) and were the fifth highest by college bound students (8%). Approximately, seven in ten (72%) said they wanted teachers who were enthusiastic, who had high expectations for them, and who were demanding, but also consistent. When describing their teachers as a motivating influence, the three most frequently expressed insights could be summarized as follows:

1. The ability to effectively communicate a love of the subject;
2. A caring competent professional, who truly respected all of their students; and
3. Someone who emphasized "hands-on" projects, and a lot of class discussions.

COLLEGE

Getting accepted to college ranked as the fourth most powerful motivation (10% of the responses) for the students who were planning to pursue higher education after high school.

> "I would like to go to college out of state. I would like to do something somewhat prestigious. I'm not looking for the common job, therefore, I don't want to make common grades."
> (10th grade college)

Table 29 lists the top five institutions of higher learning identified by the students participating in the study, in terms of where they were most likely to attend, if accepted.

Table 29. Top Five In-State and Out-of-State College Choices.

West Virginia Institutions	Out-of-State Institutions
1. West Virginia University	Virginia Tech
2. Marshall University	Penn State
3. Fairmont State College	University of North Carolina
4. West Virginia Wesleyan College	Harvard
5. Concord College	Ohio State and University of Kentucky (tied)

While a majority of students expressed an interest in applying to both in-state and out-of-state institutions, when asked if they were accepted to their first choice, by a margin of 53% to 47%, they said if given the opportunity, they would leave West Virginia to attend college.

FRIENDS

This category was ranked fourth by those not planning to attend college (9%) and sixth by the college bound students (6%). For many students (approximately 20 percent of each group) their peers were identified as the "strongest" and most important "motivating influence" concerning achievement in school. Healthy competition between groups of friends to see who would get the best grades on assignments, papers and tests was a recurring theme expressed in the surveys and during the interviews. Additionally, older classmates were often discussed as assuming the role of "big brother or sister" and in that capacity were positioned to provide motivation (i.e., in the form of counseling or tutoring or mentoring) to their younger friends.

> "My friends and I always compete for good grades. We are always telling each other what we got, and you always want to kind of do better than everybody else. Its kind of fun that way."
> (9th grade college)

GRADUATION

The challenge presented by, and the desire to graduate by those not planning to attend college was ranked as their fifth most important motivating influence (8%). This category, more than any other, highlighted the most cogent and fundamental difference between the two groups of students, in terms of their "world views" towards high school. On balance, college bound students viewed high school as, but one stage in their educational journey; whereas, non-college bound students viewed high school as their final destination.

> "School is important to me because after high school you go on to college, and of course, your career...I find it very important to do well in school and that will help me do well in life in general."
> (10th grade college)

> "My sister said it doesn't matter if I continue on and go to college, so long as I complete high school and try to make a life."
> (12th grade student)

GRADES

"First one is definitely getting good grades. Later on down the road I'm sure they are going to help me with getting a job and succeeding in the world."
(9th grade student)

The desire to get "good" grades was ranked seventh by both groups of students (and in identical proportion to each groups' total responses, 5%). Unfortunately, seven in ten students participating in the study (69%) said cheating in one form or another on assignments, homework, papers, and tests is "common" where they go to school. On a positive note, by an even larger majority (81%), the students believed their school should teach the value of honesty in the context of getting a "real" high school education.

ARMED SERVICES

"I'm not looking to be a soldier, I want training for a technical job in the future."
(12th grade student)

For those not planning to attend college, a career in one of the branches of the U.S. Armed Services ranked as their number one job choice (see Table 28). Consistent with this stated aspiration, the U.S. Armed Services was identified as the eighth most important motivating influence (4%).

LOVE OF LEARNING

"I really love to know things, I have a real thirst for knowledge."
(11th grade college)

The pure joy of learning ranked eighth (4%) for college bound students, and ninth (3%) for those not planning to attend college. This motivating influence was characterized and portrayed by referring to education as a pleasurable activity. Students described the excitement and experience derived from learning or discovering something for the very first time.

WINNING A SCHOLARSHIP

The ninth ranked motivator for the college bound students (3%) was the goal of being the recipient of some type of academic or athletic scholarship to help pay for part or all of the costs of attending college. Interestingly, all of the students represented within the category said they were still planning to go to college, in the event they did not secure a partial or full scholarship. To the extent they weren't successful, they said they (i.e., family) would attempt to borrow the additional amounts necessary to meet their college expenses.

> "I want to be able to get into a good college and we don't have a lot of money for that. I need to get a scholarship." (11th grade college)

SPORTS

> "Athletics motivates me to do better in school because I have to make better grades to be on the team." (11th grade college)

The last of the top ten motivating influences identified by both groups of students (each with 3% of the responses) was to compete in individual and/or team sports. Over eight in ten (83%) of the students believed there was a direct correlation between their sports participation and their commitment (i.e., positive attitude) towards their schoolwork. There appeared to be a strong consensus among these students that this dedication to sports manifested itself through the improvement of their overall motivation to do well in all of the academic subjects.

"The top three motivating influences in my life which make me want to do well in school are..."

Representative responses to the statement:

"My parents. Neither one of them got an education, but they both have good jobs. They would have gone farther in life, if they had an education." (12th grade student)

"My brother. He didn't go to college. He told me that the only way to have a good life is through college. Be smart, use my brain, because he has to use his hands now to make a living." (11th grade college)

"All my life my parents have preached to me that school is the most important thing in the world." (12th grade college)

"My parents expectations for me. My parents compelling desire for me to do well, and my desire not to disappoint my family and friends." (12th grade college)

"Dad-he sticks by me in everything that I do. My grades are very, very important to him. I want to do well, so I can make him proud." (10th grade student)

"My mom always told me, I would be the first one in the family to graduate, so she keeps motivating me." (10th grade student)

"Because both of my parents and my brother dropped out of school. It influences me to finish high school." (11th grade student)

"When I get good grades, I can tell my parents are proud of me. I have achieved something good." (12th grade student)

"My mom is always sitting in the front row of my school plays or anything that I've done. She's always told me that I could do anything I set my mind to do, no matter what it was." (12th grade college)

"My parents have a very strong influence in how I do in school. They support me in all my decisions, even if they really don't agree with them. Their support is my greatest motivation." (11th grade college)

"I want to get a good job so I can support myself, and not have to depend on anybody." (11th grade student)

"It's easier to get a job with a high school diploma than without one." (12th grade student)

"I think my dream of having a successful career, and basically a successful life is the most important thing. It gives me the most motivation to do my best." (11th grade college)

"I don't want to end up a farmer like my dad. I've worked on a farm for so many years; I don't want to do that. I know without school my success in life would be very little. Without a high school education, you can't make it far." (10th grade student)

"I want to be successful, and I don't want to end up in a dead end job. I want to live a nice life, where I can provide for my kids. I want to have a future." (11th grade college)

"Knowing I can make something out of myself. Knowing I can make a difference in someone else's life, and knowing I can do anything if I put my mind to it." (11th grade college)

"I want to do well in life, and raise a family, have a nice place to live and not worry about struggling with money problems. I want to raise a child to where he will be brought up in the right type of environment." (12th grade student)

"My future is probably my most motivating influence. I do well in school so I can attend college, and choose a career that I will enjoy." (10th grade college)

"I want to "give back to society," and start a fulfilling job as soon as possible." (12th grade college)

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"I like to work. I can't get a good job making good money without a diploma." (12th grade student)

"I want to make something of myself, and be something when I get older and help people. I want to be happy, sit back and relax, drink lemonade on the porch, and do fun stuff." (11th grade college)

"My elementary school principal. She was always there to guide me through school. I call her every once in a while. We still talk about everything." (10th grade student)

"My teachers because they help me all the time. I have a learning disability, and they are always trying to help me to do good in school." (10th grade student)

"My teachers are dynamite. They know their stuff, and motivate me to want to do my best...all of the time." (11th grade college)

"It would be my principal. He stood up for me through thick and thin. When he gets involved with students, he really gets involved." (10th grade student)

"My science teacher. He's really nice to everyone in my class, and he's real nice to me. He believes in high education standards, but he also makes it fun." (9th grade student)

"My coaches. They tell me to keep my grades up, keep on the right path and don't hang with the wrong crowd." (10th grade student)

"It takes a very special person to be a teacher. I know my teachers have their own problems, but they never bring them to school. They motivate me by setting an example, and that's important to me." (10th grade student)

"My English teacher inspires me to keep coming to school and make good grades." (10th grade student)

"I was working on a habitat house for my church. I saw what people that do manual labor have to do to earn a living. I worked on a roof, and that's enough to make anybody get a good education." (11th grade student)

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"What motivates me is the neat idea of coming to school everyday, and learning something new about the world we live in." (10th grade college)

"Because, they (my friends) want me to do well in school." (10th grade student)

"If I need help. I can always go to my friends. They are my motivation." (12th grade student)

"A lot of my friends dropped out of school. I want to do better than they did." (11th grade student)

"I like to come to school because my friends are here." (10th grade student)

"My main motivation is to keep my grades up, so I can play football." (11th grade student)

"Plain and simple-I need to win a scholarship to go to college." (11th grade college)

"I want to be able to enlist in the Marines. I need to graduate." (10th grade student)

"I promised my mom and dad I would graduate, no matter what." (12th grade student)

"I think the big motivation for our son is seeing me going back to college. He realizes that if mom can do it, he can do it. I think that has made him more serious about school." (Focus group participant)

"I would say in the case of my daughter, first of all, is just the love of learning. Number two would be getting into a good college, and number three, just leaving open as many options for her future career." (Focus group participant)

"Grades would be number one, getting good grades." (Focus group participant)

"I think parents are the number one motivation in their child's life. You set the expectation. You set the role model. You are responsible for setting the environment to learn at home. You reinforce and enrich what's going on in the classroom, so I think parents are the number one motivators." (Focus group participant) ❑

Summary Findings

The most significant and cogent findings resulting from this research project are as follows:

- On balance, those students planning to attend college were achieving much better grades compared to those not planning to attend college (see Table 1).

- Nearly six in ten (58%), of the fathers of the college bound students had either finished college (32%), or finished graduate school (26%). This compared with approximately one in ten (9%), of the fathers of the students not planning to attend college, who had either finished college (5%), or finished graduate school (4%) (see Table 2).

- The pattern of education attained by the mothers of the students who participated in the study, and the level achieved by the fathers is similar in nature. Over 60 percent of the mothers of college bound students either finished college (37%), or finished graduate school (24%). The corresponding figures for the non-college bound mothers were twelve percent, and three percent, respectively (see Table 3).

- The number of students (expressed as a percentage) eligible to receive "free and/or reduced" meals within the group not planning to attend college mirrored, almost exactly, the statewide average for all West Virginia students in grades K-12 (48% and 49%, respectively). Within the sample group of those who were planning to attend college, only one of every sixteen students (6%), was eligible to participate (see Table 4).

- When asked whether they basically agreed or disagreed with the statement: "I am enthusiastic about coming to school and enjoy my school work very much," exactly half of those students planning to attend college agreed compared to 41 percent of those students not planning to attend college (see Table 5).

- By rather large majorities, both groups of students, when asked to complete one of the following statements: "School is a high priority in my life because..." or "School is not a high priority in my life because..." reported that school was indeed, very important to them (see Table 10). For those planning to attend college, over half (54%), expressed the view that high school was a high priority because of its importance and relationship to pursuing a professional career. For those not planning to attend college, seven in ten (72%), expressed graduating from high school would be critical to their success in securing a decent paying job after they completed their studies.

- Nearly nine in ten (88%), of those planning to attend college, and eight in ten (80%), of those not planning to attend college responded affirmatively to the statement, "I try hard to achieve good grades on tests, and all the other

assignments I have in my classes." Getting accepted to the college of their choice was the number one reason identified by college bound students for agreeing with the statement. For non-college bound students, the goal of graduating from high school with their friends was the most frequent response cited for their agreement with the statement.

- In assessing the potential relationship or link between what they were learning today, to their success tomorrow (i.e., future), both groups of students articulated the view by large margins, that the connection was a real one (see Table 19).

- When asked to complete the following statement: "The top three obstacles in my life which make it difficult at times for me to do well in school are..." nine of the top ten obstacles identified by each group of students were in the same categories. To the extent there were differences, they were in relation to the relative weight (i.e., priority or ranking) the two groups of students assigned to the respective obstacles (see Tables 24 and 25).

- Overall, homework (magnitude and difficulty) was the number one obstacle in aggregate responses. It had a combined response level of 29% (16% of the non-college group, and 13% of the college group). It ranked number one for those not planning to attend college, and number two for those who were planning to attend college.

- Participation in individual and/or team sports ranked as the number one obstacle identified by college bound students (15% of the responses). For those not planning to attend college, sports ranked ninth (6% of the responses). These figures reflect a microcosm of the overall participation rates for the two groups of students. Nearly seven in ten (68%) of the college bound students were involved in at least one sport, compared to approximately three in ten (29%), of their counterparts.

- The obstacle category "Boyfriend/Girlfriend," which also included all direct references to other friends, classmates and peers of the students in the study, was ranked second by those not planning to attend college (14% of the responses), and third by the college bound students (12% of the responses).

- Teachers were identified by both groups of students as being both obstacles and motivators, when it came to doing well (or poorly) in school. In the context of being identified as an obstacle, teachers were frequently described as "boring", and "unapproachable for assistance", and "not caring (i.e., lack of respect) for their students as individuals." In terms of being a motivating influence, teachers were often described as "effective communicators", and "competent professionals who respect their students", and "promoters of a lot of class discussions and 'hands-on' projects".

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- Almost half of both groups of students (49% of college bound and 48% non-college bound) had part-time employment during the school year. These statistics manifested themselves and were responsible for both groups identifying part-time jobs as one of their major obstacles. It ranked fourth for non-college students (11% of the responses) and eighth for college bound students (7% of the responses).

- Almost all of the students in both groups who identified "not enough sleep" as a major obstacle (98% of college bound, and 97% of non-college bound) believed a later starting time for the beginning of the school day would have a positive effect on their motivation.

- In responding to the following statement: "The top three motivating influences in my life which make me want to do well in school are..." eight of the top ten motivators were in the same categories. To the extent there were differences, they were in relation to the relative weight (i.e., priority or ranking) the two groups of students assigned to the respective motivators (see Tables 26 and 27).

- "Family" was ranked the number one motivating influence by both groups of students, and it garnered over half of all the responses (26% for college bound, and 27% for non-college bound). In fact, "family involvement" was referenced by 98 percent of the students participating in the study.

- Securing a career in the future was ranked the second highest motivator by both groups of students with a combined level of 43 percent of the responses (22% of the non-college group, and 21% for the college group). Approximately seven in ten (72%), of those planning to attend college predicted they would leave West Virginia to pursue their careers. Conversely, approximately eight in ten (83%), of those not planning to attend college predicted they would remain in West Virginia after completing high school to pursue their chosen careers.

- While a majority of college bound students were planning to apply to both in-state and out-of-state institutions, when asked if they were accepted to their first choice, by a margin of 53% to 47%, they said if given the opportunity, they would leave West Virginia to attend college.

- A recurring theme echoed throughout the student interviews and discussions was the "expressed need" to be better prepared for high school level work in terms of overall organizational skills. ❑

Public Policy Implications and Considerations

The premier challenges we face in striving to create environments where our high school students are highly motivated to learn are prodigious in magnitude, profound in importance, and myriad in number. Like most complex issues or problems, they are the result of multiple causes and contributing factors.

Students Speak: "What Motivates Us?" was not a research effort that discovered a universal panacea to effectively address all of the subtleties and nuances associated with improving student motivation. However, the empirical body of evidence embodied within the scope of the study can assist us to better understand, and therefore, respond to what influences students to be motivated in any particular school environment. Accordingly, it appears to be both prudent and practical to carefully consider the development of concomitant strategies for possible implementation. It is within these parameters and context, that the following specific, substantive policy considerations are respectfully submitted.

They are not intended to be exhaustive in nature, nor are they necessarily intended to be viewed as mutually exclusive from each other. Each of the issues (i.e., questions identified) flows as a product of the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of the cumulative information generated by the research project. Finally, they are not being presented in any particular order of importance or priority ranking. Each can and should be examined (considered) on their own individual merits to determine what, if any, policy actions are appropriate, practical and affordable in terms of addressing these issues.

1. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from an increase in the number of professional counselors available for guidance?

The research highlighted the enormous workload (burden) our education system places on our high school counselors. For the nine schools participating in the study, there was one professional counselor assigned to, and responsible for, approximately every 350 students. Statewide, for all of the high schools, the ratio was one to approximately 330 students.[10] Given the vast array of goals the counselors were trying to assist students to achieve: A) Academic planning and career guidance; B) Development of a positive self-concept; C) Development of interpersonal relationship skills; and D) Development of overall decision making skills, there simply was not enough time to address all of the students' collective needs. Forced to prioritize, the quality of counseling services appeared to often be compromised and occasionally, were not available (provided) at all. The research data underscored how,

[10] There was an average aggregate enrollment at the nine participating schools during 1998-1999 of 7,391 students, and a total of 21 counselors. Statewide, there were 90,954 students in grades 9-12, and a total of 275 counselors.

in these observed "understaffed" school environments, student problems were not solved, but only exacerbated, and the effects on motivation were extremely negative in nature. The net result of this apparent "understaffing" often permeated the entire school culture without any intention, consciousness, or knowledge that it was becoming a negative influence on the overall level of student motivation. Given the extreme challenges and temptations faced by students during their "transitional teenage years," it appears the question of whether all of our high schools have a sufficient number of counselors is worthy of further examination and analysis.

2. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from changing the time classes begin each day?

To reiterate, reinforce and amplify from what was reported earlier in the text of the report, almost all of the students who identified "not enough sleep" as a major obstacle (98% of college bound, and 97% of non-college bound) believed a later starting time for the beginning of the school day would have a positive effect on their motivation. This viewpoint was also shared by approximately seven in ten (71%) of those individuals who were participating in the Focus Group meetings, and by a majority of the professional educators who were interviewed at each school (62%). Given that starting times already vary from one high school to another, and the sheer number of activities that already take place after the official school day ends, careful planning would be required to coordinate any meaningful deviation from the current schedules; however, the research suggests it could be a wise and judicious course of action to carefully address this question by identifying all of the potential benefits and costs associated with implementing such changes.

3. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from participating in an "Organizational Seminar"?

A recurring theme echoed throughout the student interviews and discussions was the "expressed need" to be better prepared for high school level work in terms of overall organizational skills. In fact, approximately eight in ten (82%) of all the students who participated in the study agreed with the proposition that if they had the opportunity, they would likely benefit from an elective "seminar" which focused on those often overlooked, but nonetheless, very important competencies which can frequently mean the difference between success and failure. This type of "seminar" could be offered as an extension of a student's orientation to high school, and would continue throughout their first semester. It could be designed to include and address, but not necessarily limited to, the following topical areas: A) Time management skills; B) Listening and note taking skills; C) Interpersonal relationship skills; and D) General motivation techniques and strategies for success in school. Simply stated, such a "seminar" could be structured "to help students learn, how to learn" in high school. A comprehensive examination of the potential advantages and disadvantages of developing this type of curriculum offering appears to be warranted.

4. To what extent, if any, would high school students benefit from implementing comprehensive programs which emphasized successful techniques to improve motivation?

The research indicated for students to attain high levels of motivation, and to be able to sustain or remain motivated, it needs to become a priority in their lives. Given this reality, perhaps we could consider designing multiple programs in our high schools, all of which could be developed to support the common theme of focusing student attention on motivation. Such programs could possibly include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following types of efforts: A) Providing a series of motivational speakers who would address the student body; B) Involving parents, business leaders, and other community leaders in forums discussing the issues concerning motivation; C) Encouraging administrators and teachers to engage in professional development programs that emphasize the various aspects of motivation strategies; D) Designing ways to demonstrate to students how motivation contributes to their success in non-educational environments and endeavors; E) Having administrators and teachers discuss with students how motivation plays an important role in their lives, both professionally and personally; and F) Structuring the school environment in such a way that a clear message is sent to the community which declares learning is a lifelong process, and to truly achieve it, self-motivation is a critical component of the process.

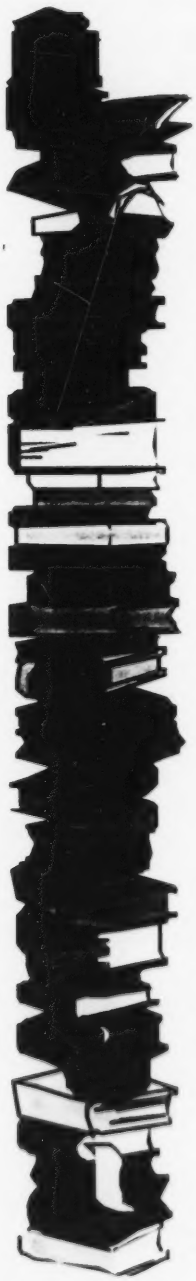
5. What economic strategies can our state implement to insure that today's high school students will have the option, opportunity (in a real economic sense), and motivation to become tomorrow's West Virginia adults?

To the extent the students involved in this study are a representative projection of all of West Virginia's young adults in general, we are likely to be confronted with some very vexing public policy questions and issues in the coming years. As reported in the context of potential careers, 72% of those planning to attend college predicted they would leave West Virginia to pursue their careers, irrespective of where they intended to go to school. Conversely, 83% of those not planning to attend college predicted they would remain in West Virginia to pursue their chosen careers. The potential negative consequences to our state's economy, our overall tax base, and our ability to enhance the quality of life (i.e., standard of living) of our citizens are self-evident, if we experience the out migration pattern indicated by these statistics. Given the challenges we face, and how we respond to them, could very well be a defining moment in terms of shaping our state's economic future. ❑

Final Thought

West Virginia's high school students have spoken. They are telling us they are serious about their futures. They are also asking us to provide school environments and school cultures within which, they can be "motivated" to achieve their full potential, and to be prepared to live the balance of their lives, with a clear sense of mission and true purpose. ❑

Appendices



Appendix A
"Motivation" Student Survey

Appendix B
Selected Bibliography on Motivation

APPENDIX A

The Education alliance
Business and Community for Public Schools

"Motivation" Research Study: Student Survey

Name _____

High School _____

Grade _____

Section One Directions: Please read the four questions in this section, and then circle the response that best describes your situation.

1. *What kinds of grades do you most frequently achieve?*

Mostly A's
Some A's and some B's
Mostly B's
Some B's and some C's
Mostly C's
Mostly below C's

2. *How far did your father go in school?*

Did not finish high school
Finished high school
Attended some college
Finished college
Finished graduate school

3. *How far did your mother go in school?*

Did not finish high school
Finished high school
Attended some college
Finished college
Finished graduate school

4. *Are you eligible to participate in your school's "free and reduced" lunch program?*

Yes **No**

Section Two Directions: Please read each question, and then write your answer in the space provided. If you need additional space to respond to any questions, feel free to use the backside of the page.

1. *What I study in school will be very important to my success in the future after I graduate.* **Do you basically agree or disagree with this statement and briefly explain the reasons for your answer.**

2. *I try hard to achieve good grades on tests, and all the other assignments I have in my classes.* **Do you basically agree or disagree with this statement and briefly explain why?**

3. *School is a high priority in my life because...*
School is not a high priority in my life because...
Please complete which one of the above statements that most accurately reflects how you feel about school.

4. *I am enthusiastic about coming to school and enjoy my school work very much.* **Do you basically agree or disagree with this statement? Briefly explain why you feel the way you do.**

5. *The top three obstacles in my life which make it difficult at times for me to do well in school are...*
Please complete this statement.

6. *The top three motivating influences in my life which make me want to do well in school are...*
Please complete this statement.

Thank you for your responses.

APPENDIX B
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON MOTIVATION

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